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ABSTRACT

The paper examines six issues affecting the development of vocational education programs for handicapped students in rural areas. Problems facing special education in rural areas include financial difficulties and inadequate services. The following six issues are addressed (sample recommended strategies for change in parentheses): broadening the curriculum (flexible scheduling, programed and computerized instruction); working with teachers (employment of itinerant teachers, interns, and paraprofessionals); cooperation with neighboring districts and the community (teacher exchange, mobile labs or classrooms, rotation of instructional materials and equipment between schools); community relations (community resource trainers, creation of jobs needed but nonexistent in the community); students' needs (student exchange, parent involvement, and residential boarding programs); and management in the small district (use of combined facilities, and solicitation of assistance of state and community agencies). For each issue, examples of innovative approaches used in rural areas are cited. (CL)

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Vocational Education for the Handicapped in Rural Areas

Introduction

Since 1970 rural America's population base has experienced a significant resurgence. The rural to urban migration of people before World War II has halted and even reversed. The rural areas have gained population at a rate 40 percent higher than metropolitan areas. Even though the farm population has experienced a decline, rural areas continue to attract a growing number of residents. Farm population represents less than 20 percent of the total rural population.

Generalizations about rural schools must be approached with the same caution that accompanies generalizations about rural communities as a whole. Rural school districts encompass everything from poverty-stricken communities with poorly trained teachers to prosperous communities with well-credentialed teachers. Many rural schools would be considered excellent by any standard, while others are woefully inadequate, and desperately in need of assistance.

The term "rural education" to some people implies education that has been scaled down or has a different connotation. Educational needs for students are the same regardless of where a student happens to reside. The differences are availability of teachers, access to training programs, funds provided, transportation, and local job opportunities. Rural education is a study of service delivery rather than a different or abbreviated type of educational process.

Education in rural areas has been neglected in the past but has reached national attention since 1976. The recent energy crunch and shrinking educational dollars are but two of the reasons small school systems have been left seeking ways to serve the educational needs of a diverse group of students (Hobbs, 1981). Non-metropolitan cities (cities under 50,000) spend twice as much on transportation as central city schools and 50 percent more than suburban schools. Thirty-two percent of all elementary and secondary students nationwide are enrolled in non-metropolitan schools and nearly 12,000 of the 16,500 school districts are non-metropolitan. Fifty-four percent of the 12,000 districts have enrollments less than 600 (Sher, 1981). 1,260 districts have 300 or fewer students and approximately one out of every five students in America attend a rural country school (Jess, 1981). With transportation costs omitted as instructional costs, the difference in expenditures between metropolitan and non-metropolitan schools is even greater. The lower salaries paid rural teachers may be at least partially responsible for the rural teacher shortage reported in the midwest.

Students from areas of less than 10,000 population score 1 to 4 percent below national average on National Assessment of Educational Progress tests and students from areas of between 10,000 to 25,000 population score near the national median. Nationwide figures show rural/non-metro areas with as high as 5 percent students not in school. Three-fifths of rural/non-metro students do not have access to kindergarten or preprimary programs. All these facts point to a challenge before rural educators including how to stimulate learning, provide for individual differences, finance necessary teachers, and secure educational materials and equipment (Sher, 1981).

Regular education in rural areas is satisfactory and sometimes quite good for average students but there are special groups of students that

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continue to be disproportionately underserved or badly served by the rural educational system. These underserved groups tend to fall into four broad categories: minority populations, students from impoverished environments, handicapped students, and young women. In some rural schools minorities have been treated unfairly, students from poor homes have been neglected physically or mentally handicapped students have been shunned or conveniently forgotten and sex-role stereotyping have stunted the development and limited the accomplishments of rural young women. In some of these schools, the waste of human lives and loss of potential human resources has been confronted and efforts are being made to meet the special educational needs of these neglected populations (Sher, 1981).

Handicapped Students in Rural Areas

The general and vocational education needs of rural handicapped are similar to the needs of urban handicapped. The same problems of rural education delivery previously mentioned also apply to delivery of vocational education to the handicapped. Rural handicapped need adequate vocational training even though vocational special needs programs are both expensive and staff-intensive. The rural handicapped student is also faced with a limited job market, both in numbers of job opportunities and the diversity of jobs that are available.

A goal of education is to assist handicapped students in acquiring the skills necessary to function as independently as possible as adults. In recent years an increased emphasis has been placed upon teaching independent living and vocational skills to handicapped youth. Successful job placement depends upon a direct link between instruction and jobs available; skills taught must be those required to perform specific jobs. Rural vocational special needs educators are actively addressing this goal, but many obstacles confront them in attempting to provide vocational training.

Six Issues

The purpose of this LINCpaper is to discuss six issues impacting the development of vocational education programs for special needs students residing in rural areas. These issues are:

1. Broadening the curriculum
2. Working with teachers
3. Cooperation
4. Community relations
5. Students
6. Management in a small district

(The boxes are examples of innovative approaches to resolving these issues taken by various rural schools.)

Broadening the Curriculum

Universal goals of vocational education for special needs students are competency in basic vocational skills, worker roles and citizenship. But the resources available and community values cause schools to take different routes to the same end. Small school districts may have curriculum that is less specialized, more personalized, and smaller in class size than large school districts. Flexibility in scheduling enables small schools to make the most of the strengths of individual teachers. A less obtrusive bureaucracy puts instruction, rather than management of massive class scheduling, in center stage. In the area of curriculum teachers and administrators in small school districts must work together to shape programs designed to meet the specific vocational needs of their students.

The vocational education for special needs persons and supportive services may be modification of regular programs, special supplementary services to regular programs, or specially designed programs. Some schools have attempted to develop programs to serve the educational and social development needs of special needs students. Small school systems may have organizational structure and curriculum designed for cooperation (Heady, 1981).

Strategies for Change: Scheduling.

Scheduling is a system of appropriate and timely delivery of instruction to students. Scheduling involves administrative coordination and teacher involvement to enhance correct timing of delivery of effective curriculum. Strategies for change might be:

Flexibility—The length of a class period can vary in allotted time. Research has shown that in the case of skill development, such as learning typing, intensive practice for a short period of time at frequent intervals is much more effective than spending the same amount of time in long periods at less frequent intervals. Conversely, teaching processes such as the disassembly of a carbureator is more effective if sufficient time is allowed to complete the entire process.

Mini-courses—Packaging vocational content into mini-courses can be done by separating the skills that stand alone. Examples of units that contain a subprocess are placement and installation of home security devices, pastry baking, operation and repair of commercial sewing machines.

> Re-organizing the curriculum around skills and grouping students according to needs in each area without regard to age?
>
> Vickie Esarey, administrator of the Dixie, WA, elementary school with 42 students, states they found "we could use each teacher's best skills to the advantage of all students." The reorganization, after two years, produced significant student gains on the California Achievement Test.

> Using teachers during the summer to work on curriculum and instructional improvement?
> In San Jacinto, CA, Superintendent Don Wickert reports that teachers have worked on math and language arts, developed manipulative math materials, planned bilingual programs, and organized an ethics education proposal. This approach, he says, allows the district to improve its educational program at a very nominal cost and to reward better staff members. The teachers who work on the projects help implement them into the curriculum.

Programmed—Programmed instruction provides students with materials broken down into small, easy-to-learn steps that can be pursued on an individual basis and at an individual pace. These materials may be in either a linear or branching format. In the linear approach the student must go through each of the steps, moving ahead when answering each segment correctly. With the branching approach students are allowed to skip some of the smaller steps when the concepts have been mastered. However, when an error is made the student pursues remedial instructional until the question is answered correctly. The major advantage to programmed instruction is changing the role of the teacher from dispensing information to managing instruction; this can result in individualized instruction for students.

Computerized—Instructional material appropriate to individual students can be presented by a computer. Instruction was initially developed for math-oriented subjects such as accounting and computations but technology has progressed to include answer retrieval and information storage and programming in other content areas.

Independent Study—Independent study is developed specifically for a particular student's learning needs and provides an individual choice of curriculum developed to include course content to fit these needs. This study can allow handicapped students to gain information and skills needed in order to be mainstreamed.

Correspondence Study—Correspondence study is for the home bound handicapped student unable to attend vocational classes and to supplement existing curriculum. Correspondence study enables all students to benefit from reputable vocational programs that are some distance away but may be especially appropriate for a learner's specific needs.

Television, Radio, Telephone—Handicapped students may enhance their vocational education through technology to provide access to experts around the world. Closed circuit educational television, conference calls and radio can inform and instruct handicapped students.

Off-campus Experiences—Schools can arrange field trips, work experience, work observation and research to be included on established trips away from school. Students can report on their experiences through photography, tape recordings, oral reports, and written work.

Learning Centers—Learning centers may be an excellent means of providing a wide range of subject matter in a variety of forms. Frequently the students use the learning center to meet individual needs by using individualized materials, and various media thus decreasing the direct instructional role of the teacher. Students are able to fill in gaps from previous instruction and gain self-reliance and confidence.

The Klemme, Iowa, superintendent, Dick Corricle, incorporating many little ideas and big goals, has fashioned a "total" program for the districts' 230 students. It includes:

a) Pre-kindergarten program to give children an extra boost in physical and social activities. It meets two hours in the afternoons three days a week; parents pay $25 a month to help cover costs.
b) Magic Circle for elementary students, focusing on self-understanding and human development, scheduled two or more times a week as teachers see fit.
c) Crossing grade lines to extend grouping according to needs in reading.
d) Resource rooms, in both elementary and secondary levels to help students work on specific learning problems, staffed by two full-time teachers and two part-time aides.
e) Work-study program, available to seniors for career exploration for credit.
f) Computerized instruction, offering over 2,000 topics to high school students from morning until night.
g) Individualized programs for students not capable of doing regular classroom work, with special instruction provided by a full-time teacher aide.
h) Exploratory program of special classes for the junior high school students in home economics, shop, typing and art, offered each quarter.
i) Gifted and talented materials, put together during a special summer workshop for teachers. The school district, like many others, faces budget limitations, says Corricle, but much of the supplemental activity for students and teachers has been financed by aggressive grant-searching. One of the pay-offs for expanding the curriculum as much as possible—all of the secondary grades ranked above average on the Iowa Test of Educational Development.

Working with Teachers

No problem disturbs the small school district administrator more than obtaining quality teachers. They are the essence of a small school when they are excellent, its nemesis when they are below community standards. Respondents to the American Association of School Administrators Small School Districts Network survey repeatedly report that finding and retaining well-trained teachers is the major key to improving their schools. Training institutions do not offer special preparation for teachers who want to teach in small schools and, more important, most don't even encourage teacher candidates to think about small school environments. Many school administrators wish teachers in small schools could be trained in two teaching fields. Teaching in a small school involves more personal contact with parents and community, more class preparations and more assigned after school activities. One great advantage that comes through in most successful programs is the "open" policy in small schools where teachers are truly members of a team. For a program to be successful, however, the principal must provide leadership to his/her team.

Strategies for Change: Instructors.

Teachers are the key to providing quality vocational programs. The best curriculum, expensive equipment, spacious classrooms, and unlimited financial resources can not replace the necessary communication between teacher and student. Strategies for change can include:

Itinerant Teachers—These specialist teachers travel between schools and can provide each school with expertise that each alone could not afford. For example, house construction in cooperating school systems could use teachers with expertise in foundation, exterior framing, wiring, plumbing, masonry, etc., and rotate them to a house in each school system.

Teacher Intern—Undergraduate student teachers enrolled in teacher education at colleges and universities can be enlisted to give assistance with instructional process.

Retired or Unemployed Teachers—Teachers living in the area can be an addition to the instructional process to provide expertise in vocational areas. Life-long travels and experiences of retired and unemployed teachers can be tapped by local educators to volunteer or even be hired for part-time instruction.

Community Based Specialists—Many specialists are employed through the University Extension programs and usually are located in county seat towns. These individuals represent such areas as home economics, business management, community development and agriculture and can share their particular expertise in many vocational fields. In addition the local business owners and operators can enhance the educational procedure in the classroom for specific occupations.

Paraprofessionals—Paraprofessionals assist the teacher in the classroom to increase the quality and intensity of student instruction. Teaching handicapped students to develop job competencies such as seeking, accepting and keeping a job, may require a one-on-one teaching situation.

Team Teaching—Team teaching allows teachers to use their specific expertise needed in an occupation. For example, teaching entrepreneurship in food service would involve the home economics teacher and possibly the business teacher. Special education teachers cooperate with other teachers for specific skills needed by most handicapped students for pre-entry into a vocational class, such as reading a thermometer for health careers.

Teachers Inservice Training—Administrators are interested in retaining Vocational Special Education and regular teachers to implement vocational services to the handicapped. Providing local inservice training is an excellent way of helping teachers increase their effectiveness. Timely vocational courses are offered on college campuses across the nation. School systems sometimes reimburse the teachers for their expenses in obtaining course work needed to upgrade their profession and service to educate handicapped students.

Wayne Cook, superintendent at Marionville, MO meets with the entire staff of 46 after each monthly board meeting to report on what happened at the meeting. "This procedure has been very helpful in building staff morale and confidence in the administration and the school board," he says.

In the Chittenden Central Supervisory District, VT, teachers designed a survey to find out what teachers thought of current staff development and inservice programs. The school administration learned there was room for improvement. Teachers found sessions sometimes boring and non-productive, says Christine Barnes, assistant superintendent for instruction. Some even complained "We'd rather be teaching." So, administrators and teachers began to work together on an inservice committee, planning around what teachers wanted. For example, elementary teachers said they felt isolated in their school and out of touch with the other five schools in the district. The solution? The inservice committee organized district-wide programs. A dynamic speaker started things off in the morning, followed by mini-workshops on suggested topics in the afternoon. There is a mid-morning break with refreshments, and a potluck lunch, followed by a session on New Games before the afternoon workshops. Teachers also saw resources all around them but complained of too little time to talk or learn from one another. Solution? The inservice committee set up a series of after-school workshop courses in a variety of subject areas conducted with "in-house" talent. These covered such subjects as classroom management, career education, mini-computers, natural science, expanding curriculum for the gifted and talented and speech/language skills. Teachers received recertification credit for participating which counted on the salary schedule. Realizing that teachers with highly specialized training might not get much out of the general inservice days, the committee, at one program, provided 25 mini-workshops on a variety of topics, such as global awareness and special education. Nearly every content area was covered, as well as those of personal or unusual interest—e.g., coping with stress, a session with the superintendent (well attended) and the impact in the classroom of children of divorce. Teachers gave immediate feedback on the inservice programs through an evaluation sheet. "Teachers are beginning to understand that we're working for them, want and need their ideas and will implement what they wish, if at all possible," says Barnes.

Cooperation

Small schools faced with budget constraints find cooperation and sharing with neighboring districts means an expanded program of instruction and survival. "Our very existence is dependent on sharing with neighboring districts" says Lowell Schwalbe, Superintendent Morton, Minnesota. Formal sharing arrangements grew rapidly in the late 1960's as the consolidation of school districts lost its momentum. The concept of sharing through educational service agencies has been an outstanding success story in the past decade. The service agencies have developed specialities of their own, divided into three general patterns: (1) special districts established by the state agency, usually providing direct services to students; (2) regional service agencies established by state agencies, delivering services to districts but usually not directly to students; and (3) cooperative agencies, formed on the basis of the needs of two or more local school districts.

People and programs emphasizing cooperation exist. Vocational education for disadvantaged persons, through the Education Amendments of 1976 (PL 94-482) includes programs and supportive services designed to enable disabled students to achieve vocational education objectives that might have in the past been beyond their reach. Cooperation with social service agencies outside the sphere of education is critical. A good personal relationship must be developed and positive linkages maintained with community action agencies, the Job Training Partnership Act office, Job Service, local business and industry, juvenile justice authorities, Family Services and Social Services offices, and a host of others (Heady, 1981).

Strategies for Change: School Systems.

No one school system can provide for the vocational needs of handicapped students without aide from various sources. Strategies for change can be:

Cooperative Schools Concept—Two or more schools can benefit one another as they exchange or share curriculum, school newspapers, students, etc. Sharing stimulates acquisition and production of multimedia material by the teachers in each school. For example, the acquisition of materials for blind students in one school system can be exchanged for methods of aiding orthopedically handicapped students to obtain typing skills available from another school system.

Teacher Exchange—Small school systems can expand their vocational curriculum by exchanging teachers such as electronics and health occupations teachers and can share the costs.

Mobile Labs or Classrooms—Mobile units can be financed through grants for use on a rotating basis to reduce costs of expensive equipment and facilities. Advanced equipment, such as vocational evaluation and industrial training equipment, can be too expensive to duplicate. This kind of mobile equipment can become units and be coordinated with the cooperating schools to give each school maximum benefit.

Instruction Material and Equipment Rotated—Small school systems can form regions that have coordinated schedules for using instructional materials partially funded by each participating school. An example is equipment needed for the instruction of visually and hearing impaired students. Some curriculum materials can be mastered in short lengths of time. When mastered these materials can be rotated to another district needing the curriculum for a special needs student. Students would have access to much more than the normal amount of instructional material under a rotating system.

In Warenda, MO, the 30 high school students are bussed to a neighboring community 10 miles away, but the 40 students in grades K-8 stay close to home, with a varied curriculum available. There are only three and one-half professional staff members but well-integrated use of instructional TV supplements the curriculum considerably. A music teacher comes once a week and two highlights of the year are all-student vocal programs at Christmas and in the spring. Every other week the students ride a bus to the county seat to visit the public library. The school system contracts with consultants for special needs such as speech therapy. In addition, an extended day allows the school to provide a breakfast program (over 75% of the students receive free or supplemental food services). "The staff is talented, and versatile," says principal Ed Castle, "and the community is totally supportive of the school." The building, constructed in 1934, has a gymnasium, stage and dining room, as well as classrooms and offices. It has become a community center. Castle admits there are alternatives facing schools as small as that in Warenda, "but it seems to us our plan is best for the community, its people and its students. . . We will continue to be a small, proud rural community."

Community Relations

The one area in which small schools reign supreme is community relations. Rural communities are built around the school, and when it leaves the community, the economy is affected. Young families want to be in close proximity to the school because it provides continuity for the children. More than 100 rural school systems have followed the model developed at Rabun Gap, Georgia, known as the Foxfire project, to use student skills in preserving the cultural heritage of a community. Most urban schools are forced to simulate environmental experiences for their students while rural schools are living laboratories. Yet, even when the spirit of collaboration between school and community is as natural as that experienced by small schools, the demands of contemporary life can chip away the cooperation. Staff must work continuously to strengthen these ties.

Strategies for Change: Outside the School

Handicapped students spend much time during their formative years inside the walls of classrooms but eventually must make their own way in the community and every day life, with skills to facilitate adult independent living. Strategies for change might include:

Cooperative Vocational Education—Arrangements between school and employers to give students vocational instruction by coordinating study in the classroom and on a job is an expedient and useful method which the rural school can use effectively. Academic courses can be made relevant when skills taught are used to perform a task on a job. Vocational teachers can assess the entry level skills of the job, then provide instruction for obtaining entry level knowledge and skills. Also, job-related parallel instruction can be provided to special needs students.

Community Resource Trainer—The community resource trainer is a person residing within a community that might agree to convey a skill, trade, craft, or knowledge to handicapped students in vocational fields such as taxidermists, gunsmiths, leathergoods, loggers, horticulture, etc. Job placement is enhanced as members of the community become actively involved with the handicapped students.

Job Creation—Job creation is developing a new job market through training for jobs which are needed but non-existent in the community. Because new jobs can provide goods and/or services not currently available locally, there is the potential to increase business activity and employment opportunities. Sharing information with Community Development, Manpower Planning, and local civic leaders and Chambers of Commerces can increase the economic well being of a rural area and provide jobs for handicapped students.

Lowell Schwalbe is superintendent of a 300-student school, K-12, serving the area around Morton, MN. His motto is "to cooperate with all our neighboring schools for the betterment of all," and he has left no part of the educational program or administration untouched by his approach to sharing. "Some types of cooperating are more successful than others, some help students, while others just save money," Schwalbe points out. In the area of teaching, the Morton school: (a) sells 2/5 of its counselor time to a neighboring district, dividing up salary and mileage costs, (b) shares a speech therapist with two other school districts, breaking the salary down by days (Morton pays for 92 days), (c) shares an art teacher with another district, (d) sells half the time of a teacher for the learning disabled to a neighboring district, again dividing up salary and mileage. The Morton school has cooperated with a neighboring district to teach agriculture to six of the Morton students. The students are transported by station wagon, which is also used to transport handicapped students to another neighboring school. The same school has accepted Morton students for classes that Morton cannot offer because of low enrollments, including German, advanced art, science, math and dramatics. Payments between the districts are based on a per hour rate. Another neighboring school had only five kindergarten students one year, so Morton accepted them in its kindergarten, charging enough to be able to hire a full-time aide for the class.

Students—Our Primary Focus

One of the strengths of all small schools is that every teacher knows every student and each has respect for the other when the match is right. All the juggling of schedules, stretching of dollars and people, patching here, joining there, fretting over teachers and fixing worn-out furnace and basketball hoops are for one purpose—to help students grow into self-reliant and productive persons. The commitment is to prepare young people for choices, to broaden their experiences so that they can achieve in any kind of future. With more people moving into rural areas, small schools find themselves absorbing problems and adjustments that once were almost the exclusive burden of more urban areas. No longer is the family farm support in total for each family. One or more members in the family work in various jobs in the surrounding area. These factors result in a more heterogenous rural student body than before.

Strategies for Change: Students

Students with specific handicaps must not be neglected during the prescribed nine month, 6 hour a day school year. The students' need and wants must be directed to facilitate motivation to gain the skills needed to retain a job. Strategies for change can include:

Student Exchange—Rural students involved in their own career development may exchange experiences with urban students and make visits to increase understanding of each perspective. Visits between a research breeding ranch and a future farmer, regional office and small local branch office, high school and elementary school are examples. Other examples are visits with big brothers/sisters and "personal leave" for outstanding students to visit cooperating schools to share experiences and skills.

Residential Boarding Programs—Specialized programs or programs not otherwise available locally, such as for severely handicapped and artistically endowed handicapped students, might be in session at conservatories or during the summer in summer camps and can be sponsored by local educators.

Parent Involvement—No one has a more vested interest in each handicapped student than their parents. Transportation, personal attention, and assistance in every endeavor will rise or fall in relationship to the quality of parent support. Many parent organizations are instrumental in obtaining services for the handicapped. Parents must be included in the individual educational plan and will be the backbone of a successful vocational educational program for their child.

When student infractions don't warrant an elaborate system, a Washington state principal of a small school has a suggestion. A student needing disciplinary action writes his or her version of the incident, signs and dates it, and it is placed in a disciplinary file. If a student accumulates three statements within a three-month period, the parents are called in to read the statements. If a student doesn't have another infraction for three months, he or she can take the letter from the file and throw it away. "It seems to be a big deal for the kids," she says, "and it works for us."

High school students in the Dansville (NY) central schools have become big brothers/big sisters for youngsters in the elementary grades. High school students volunteer for the project and are linked with children whom the teachers feel would benefit from a positive relationship with an older student. The students meet in school at least one hour a week, usually during the afternoon activity period. What they do varies according to individual interests and talents. These have included swimming, reading, talking, and walking, playing board games, listening to records, playing catch, making a model, drawing and having a snack together. "Everyone involved thinks it is extremely successful," says the elementary school principal, Donald Bartalo. "Several parents even contacted the school to express their gratitude."

Management in a Small District

Ironically, the paperwork burden keeps small schools from having time to apply for funding from state and federal funds. This is aptly stated by Ed Castle, superintendent at Warenda, Missouri, "The paperwork for a small school is impossible. I wouldn't unload a whole wagonload of corn for one hog."

There are no easy solutions. Obviously, convincing policy-makers to take small school limitations into consideration when they enact mandates and regulations is a priority item for administrators working together to influence policy. Management has become a complex, burdensome thing often weighed down by requirements imposed from beyond the school systems control.

Declining revenues and excessive report writing come at a time when the possibilities for improving education of students in small schools look the brightest. New technologies are available, cooperative arrangements are working out, local determination is again in favor of strong local schools. But all this is for naught without adequate funding. As studies and information about the financial needs of small schools becomes more prevalent changes in state funding may be possible. A few states have given schools in sparsely populated areas more weight in funding formulas and others are looking at redesigning funding in terms of the needs of a minimum program rather than the number of students enrolled. Rising transportation costs, mounting energy expenses and escalating costs of materials, equipment, and building have caused some rural schools to combine classes, cut courses and even eliminate staff positions.

Strategies for Change: Finance

All the plans, motivated teachers, community support, materials and equipment must be supported by appropriate and sufficient financing to make the vocational education of handicapped students work. Making the shrinking dollar meet growing vocational needs is a major problem of each school system. Strategies for change can be:

Weatherizing School Property—Projects to conserve energy, and insulate windows could provide funds for instruction for handicapped students. Projects have been funded to train handicapped in building maintenance and improvement at the school site. Both the students and school system gain a desired outcome.

Combined Facilities—Expensive school facilities, such as libraries and lab equipment, might be shared with cooperating schools or businesses locally. School libraries might be combined with community libraries and make bonding proposals easier to initiate. Leasing or purchasing stationwagons and vans instead of purchasing buses might prove a savings for the school system.

Assistance from Agencies—Agencies might provide services and material that would otherwise be purchased through local school funds. Some of these agencies are Vocational Rehabilitation, Governors Committee on Employment of the Handicapped, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Council for Industrial Growth, Bureau for the Blind and sometimes certain industrial corporations.

Involvement of Community—Search the local area for agencies, businesses, organizations and private individuals that might be willing to provide materials, goods or money for causes that they might wish to endorse. Occasionally these benefactors will provide necessary goods at a nominal cost or none at all. The materials and equipment needed to build access ramps might be furnished to a group of handicapped students to practice their occupational skills.

Union Star (MO) Superintendent Dan Roe merely borrowed an idea from homeowners to winterize his K-12 school building that serves more than 200 students. Most of the school windows, especially those facing north, were covered with clear plastic and sealed along the edges. "The cosmetic look left something to be desired." He says, "but it didn't affect light for the classrooms and it shut off our biggest source of heat loss." The cost was less than $80 for more than 100 windows.

Superintendent Mick Starcevich of Harris-Lake Park Schools, Iowa, found it possible to cut gas consumption by 9% without cutting the educational program. The school system was worried about the transportation costs of the half-day kindergarten program, anticipating that it might come to $11,000, a jump of $3,000 in one year because of increased gas costs. After looking at different alternatives, says Starcevich, "we all agreed that the best educational program for our kindergarten youngsters was still the half-day program, every day." By centralizing the kindergarten program and staggering the bus schedule, requiring the schools to hire an aide for a short-time each day to handle students waiting for a return bus, the schools kept the educational program and saved about $3,000 on transportation costs because of the decrease in gas consumption.

Transportation distances for handicapped students to out-of-district placement became prohibitive for the Bronxville Union Free School District, Bronxville, NY. Stuart Opdahl, assistant superintendent for business affairs, describes the alternative: leasing stationwagons and vans, training custodians to become licensed part-time drivers, modifying hours to stagger the schedules, and allocating money for overtime pay when necessary. The vehicles also are used for transportation of small athletic teams. As a result, says Opdahl, "transportation costs were reduced significantly, drivers related to the children better and the morale of the custodial staff improved because they could earn additional salary." The vehicles are leased for only three years in order to avoid high maintenance costs. The plan has been working for five years, Opdahl says, "and is improving each year."

Conclusion

The underlying theme in the attempt to solve problems within rural school districts is cooperation, the kind of cooperation that exists on many levels - teachers, administrators, school, inter and intra community, cooperation that results in the sharing of curriculum, faculty and resources.

It is evident that districts vary - that educational strengths and weaknesses differ. Yet, there are some common problems among rural districts which include: curriculum, faculty, cooperation, community relations, students and district management. It has been the intent of this paper to focus on those areas in an attempt to begin the process of providing solutions to the problems faced by rural educators and administrators.

About the Authors:

Carol Holden is experienced in delivery of rural services to the handicapped in Missouri and has been involved in vocational employment and training activities.

Malcolm Flanagan, Carol Kay, Carl Cameron and Marlene Dick, staff members of Project Missouri LINC, assisted Ms. Holden in the production of this monograph.

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